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CITY EDGE:  
FORT POINT CHANNEL  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

A proposal for the design and implementation of a public and private program for the enhancement of a significant city edge.

submitted to

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

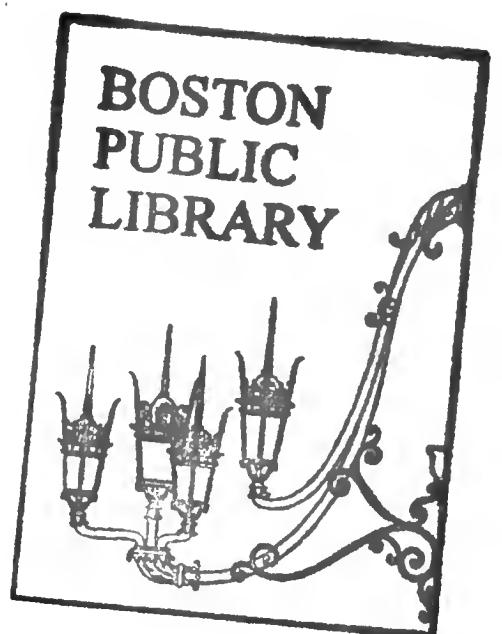
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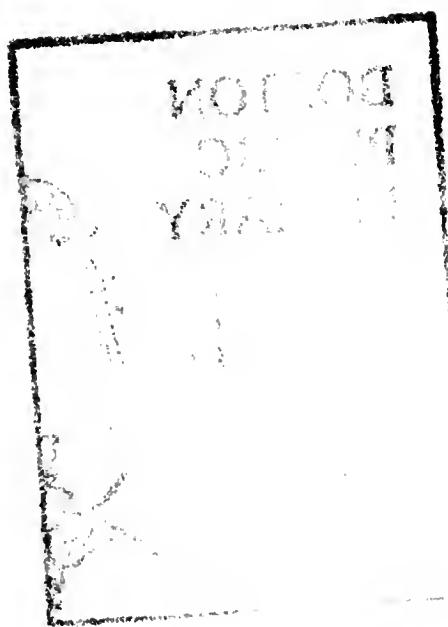
THE FORT POINT CHANNEL AREA STUDY GROUP  
BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
ONE CITY HALL SQUARE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

December 1972

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## I. PURPOSE

In keeping with the definitions of city edge as presented by the National Endowment for the Arts, Boston's Fort Point Channel is a multi-dimensional edge in both space and time. It is truly edge as interface. Interface of commerce. Interface of transportation. Interface of history. Interface of Boston tomorrow.

Fort Point Channel is the last remnant of the original edge between Boston and the sea, historically Boston's source of life. It is the edge of the existing high density central portion of the regional core and the last frontier of development in the regional core area. It is the edge where transportation in the Northeast corridor of Boston-New York-Washington will terminate: a demarcation between the urban complexity of megalopolis and the rural counterpoint of Northern New England.

Fort Point Channel is the edge where historic time as embodied in the replica of the Boston Tea Party ship "Beaver" can meet contemporary time of the living Boston. And it is also the edge where new technologies of water and air transportation of the future as well as high speed rail service will find their first demonstrations on the East coast.

Legislation and commitments by the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources to preserve the islands of Boston Harbor as recreational and conservational open space will make Fort Point Channel the edge of the city as an interface and point of departure between the intensity of the city and the solitude of the expanses of Massachusetts Bay.



The most exciting possibilities lie ahead for the Fort Point Channel area of Boston. City, State and Federal agencies as well as private developers all are geared toward implementing a Fort Point Channel development plan. This city edge, and the attractions on it, are expected to be a key part of the Bicentennial Program during which time Boston will host five to fifteen million visitors.



## II. LOCATION

Boston is a city of approximately 641,000 persons and encompasses about forty-six square miles. It is situated at the core of an economic area of 3,375,000 population which sprawls over 1,769 square miles and forms the northernmost edge of the Northeast Corridor.

The Boston Regional Core, a sub-area of the City of Boston, is composed of the Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Fenway, South Cove, North End and West End residential areas plus the Central Business District, Financial District, Waterfront, and Fort Point Channel areas. The Fort Point Channel Area is located to the southeast of the Central Business District and Financial District. It is an area of mixed industrial use separated from the rest of the regional core by the Fort Point Channel. The connection between this area and the remainder of the regional core is achieved by three obsolete bridges which span the Fort Point Channel.



### III. HISTORY

Originally Boston was a peninsula connected to the mainland of Roxbury by a narrow neck. To the southeast of the peninsula lay the South Boston flats separated by an area of slightly deeper water which lead to Roxbury Harbor or Gallows Bay, as it was also known. Bonner surveyed this channel in some detail prior to producing his famed map of Boston in 1714.

The traditional mode of growth of Boston has been to increase the land area of the center city by the filling of the adjacent mud flats and waterways. Because of the commercial buildup along the edges of Roxbury Harbor, the channel remained open to service this bay and thus escaped the fate of the now filled Mill Pond, South End, Roxbury Flats, Back Bay, South End, and South Boston Flats.

During the nineteenth century, the Fort Point Channel was a primary point of origin and destination for a large number of inter-coastal vessels which formed the backbone of American mercantile growth. Wool, cotton, leather, foodstuffs, manufactured equipment and other commodities were transported between Fort Point Channel and the other East Coast ports of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Portland and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

The coming of the Railroad in the later part of the century encouraged the filling of a portion of Roxbury Harbor, by now known as South Bay, and the construction of numerous rail freight handling facilities on the South Boston Flats. The result was that the channel which Bonner surveyed in the early eighteenth century was, by 1900, carefully defined within granite retaining walls, some of which lay upon the only part of the original Boston Peninsula which still met the sea.

It is somewhat curious to note that the only original edge of Boston still touching the sea is also the site of the famous Boston Tea Party. It was here in the year 1773 that the patriots, protesting British taxation, dumped English tea, not into Boston Harbor, but into Fort Point Channel.



#### IV. PRESENT DESCRIPTION

As a result of filling operations conducted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Works during the decades of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, South Bay is now completely filled in. Fort Point Channel retains its original width of about 600 feet, extending about 2000 feet from its mouth at the harbor. About half of this length is considered non-navigable as declared by the United States Congress but could be used by small craft with the replacement of one drawbridge which presently prevents access. The remainder of the channel has its prime usage in a lighterage and towboat firm which docks its equipment along a 600 foot length of seawall.

A sizable segment of the Boston business and political communities feel that Boston is blessed with a potentially important water resource which, if properly treated, will prove to be both an economic and cultural amenity improving the quality of urban life. In keeping with this philosophy, the current General Plan, as adopted by the City of Boston in 1965, exempts the Fort Point Channel from filling.

With the replacement of the outermost Fort Point Channel bridge, now under engineering study by the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, the Fort Point Channel will become the logical place for terminating commuter and pleasure ferry service in Boston. The Massachusetts Bay Lines, the oldest continuously operating passenger ferry service in the United States, will be relocated from its existing interim facility in the Boston Waterfront Renewal Area to a permanent terminal near the South Station Amtrak and commuter railhead. This location will be the Fort Point Channel. With this existing conventional service, and future highspeed services such as hydrofoil and hovercraft, the Fort Point Channel will be a means of bringing passengers directly into the center city from other suburban communities around Massachusetts Bay and from Logan International Airport, located only a few thousand feet across Boston Harbor from the channel mouth.



## V. ADJACENT DEVELOPMENT

At present, the Fort Point Channel is surrounded by development proposals in various stages of design and implementation. On the Northwest edge is the Boston Federal Reserve Bank complex, about to begin construction. Here too is the United States Post Office's South Postal Annex with its major new addition stretching almost a thousand feet along the channel edge. Adjacent to this is the South Station Renewal Project which is planned to include a major transportation interface for intercity and commuter rail, intercity commuter and local bus services, subway rapid transit, parking structures to accomodate 5000 cars, connections to three major limited access highways including the Massachusetts Turnpike, and possibly water transportation as discussed above and a facility for handling helicopters and vertical take-off aircraft.

Intersecting the Fort Point Channel at ninety degrees is Summer Street, a spine of the Boston retail center and prime arterial local street connecting the Central Business District to the Fort Point Channel Area. Anticipated linear growth of the Central Business District will be down Summer Street and across Fort Point Channel.

Near the South Station transportation center is the Financial District of Boston where several major new developments have been recently completed or are under construction at present. As the density of employees continues to increase, public open space is becoming more of a premium and the Fort Point Channel edge promises to be a potential source of public space for openness and nature in contrast to the formal structure of the paved plazas of the financial district.

Also adjacent to Fort Point Channel on its northwest edge is a large site controlled by ITT/Sheraton which could be developed at some point as a major facility in the Sheraton empire. At present Sheraton has no immediate plans for this site but could be encouraged by suitable public policy and development of the immediate surroundings.



On the southeast edge of the channel, away from the Central Business District, is a large parcel owned by Pier Four, Incorporated, one of the largest restaurants in Boston. This major site, at the junction of Fort Point Channel and Boston Harbor is proposed by the owner to be developed as a major hotel, restaurant and apartment complex of over two thousand units. This complex is involved with and dependent upon the ultimate form of Fort Point Channel and will ultimately help finance the implementation of public improvements in the Channel area.

Adjacent to Pier Four, Incorporated are a motley collection of excellent turn-of-the-century industrial buildings recently acquired by a British-based real estate fund for rehabilitation and reuse as a light industrial and commercial center supportive to the downtown area. Plans by this developer also include the restoration of a street adjacent to the channel for cinemas, boutiques, restaurants and other retail uses as well as other retail uses as well as the construction of 1600 apartment units overlooking the channel and financed in part by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a diverse income mix among the residents.

Also abutting Fort Point Channel is the Gillette Company, manufacturers of shaving products. Gillette has expressed a willingness to help with public amenities along the channel and maintains a baseball field for use of its employees and the adjacent South Boston community in keeping with Gillette's long association with the great American pastime of baseball.

Most recently, a group has been formed to finance the construction of a replica of the ship "Beaver" from which the Boston Tea Party tea was dumped into the channel. In July of 1973, this ship will anchor permanently in Fort Point Channel and will be the location of a Boston Tea Party commemorative stamp issuance by the Post Office Department. Although the Beaver anchorage in Fort Point Channel will be permanent, the facility in July will be a temporary tie up pending the development of some public openspace and shore facilities in the channel area.



In addition, the Governor of Massachusetts, as a result of his much publicized restudy of transportation needs in the metropolitan Boston area, has announced that a special purpose tunnel for busses and limousines will be built to service Logan Airport. This tunnel will be aligned along Fort Point Channel and will force major improvements to be made in water purity and edge treatment of the channel itself. These improvements will be funded by transportation monies as part of the overall construction cost of this piece of the major upgrading of mass transportation planned by the Governor.



## VI. STATEMENT OF DESIGN PROBLEM

As city planning agency for the City of Boston, the Boston Redevelopment Authority has established the Fort Point Channel Area Study Group. This group is producing a general plan for the entire sub-area surrounding Fort Point Channel and extending into the adjacent areas to the south and east. This plan will be completed about March of 1973.

In order to assure viable and definite development of the Fort Point Channel edge itself, it will be necessary to produce a detailed design for the edge and a rigorous implementation strategy. The National Endowment for the Arts City Edge grant will provide a means for producing such a detailed design plan and thus help assure creative and intelligent development of this highly visible urban edge.

A detailed design plan for the Fort Point Channel edge will be directed toward four immediate objectives:

1. Develop a sensitive and practical design for the channel itself and the abutting public and private spaces.
2. Formulate procedures for the coordination of the various actors and the logical unification of funding sources. Explore instruments for the implementation of the design plan such as incentive zoning, public easements, special assessments, et cetera.
3. Provide intensive ongoing daily coordination between actors to assure commitment to the design plan.
4. Immediate implementation of "key note" miniprojects to assure public support and show physical commitment to the objectives of the design plan.



## VII. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Boston Redevelopment Authority has created the Fort Point Channel Area Study Group. This National Endowment for the Arts grant will create a design and advocacy staff position which would precipitate key compromises and decisions involving the various public and private entities already committed to interest in this area.

Acting within the city planning agency, such a position would be charged with producing a design through its own efforts and in conjunction with local urban design and art talent in such a manner that the design scheme would be responsive to not only public and private entities but also to the general public which will use and experience the Fort Point Channel as a city edge.

Moreover, being allied with the municipality, this staff office would be assured of priority consideration and commitment of implementation funds as part of the city's capital improvement program and the Bicentennial Program.

For its part, the City of Boston would provide supportive services, technical assistance, land acquisition, operational funds and so forth.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is committed by legislation to the reconstruction of bridges, water pollution control, removal of derelict piers and wharf timbers and other environmental improvements.

By way of incentive zoning, public easements, special assessments and other mechanisms to be studied as part of the design scheme study, private developers will be committed to improvements to and provision of public open space and other amenities in keeping with the design plan.



## VIII. PROJECT TEAM

Any design plan development for the Fort Point Channel will involve a coordinated team provided by the participating agencies and staffed to include experts in the fields of architecture, environmental science, engineering, finance, graphic design, landscape architecture, legal and contractual services, marine engineering, planning, public relations, real estate, recreation, transportation, urban design, water transportation, and zoning.

It is intended that the National Endowment for the Arts will provide funds for the employment of a project designer and coordinator who will be a key member of this ongoing team. In addition, grant money is sought for the design and implementation of an immediate mini-project during the summer of 1973 and 1974 in order to show public commitment and to keep public sentiment in favor of appropriate design development of the Fort Point Channel edge.

Specific funding is sought as follows:

### NEA Grant (71%)

Salary for Urban Designer and Coordinator	\$ 16,000
Design services to be contracted	5,000
Mini-project design and development level studies	<u>27,000</u>
	\$ 48,000

### City of Boston (29%)

Project engineer (20% time)	3,000
Urban planner (25% time)	4,000
Legal staff (20% time)	4,000
Draftman (50% time)	3,500
Secretarial services	3,500
Reproduction costs, public relations, overhead, etc.	<u>2,000</u>
	\$ 20,000



In addition, amounts to implement the mini-project as detailed by the design plan are understood to be a commitment of the Bicentennial Program. It is anticipated that this will be in the order of \$125,000.

It is the opinion of the Fort Point Channel Area Study Group that this \$125,000 "investment" will be responsible for the precipitation of an ongoing public and private commitment of several million dollars over the next decade.

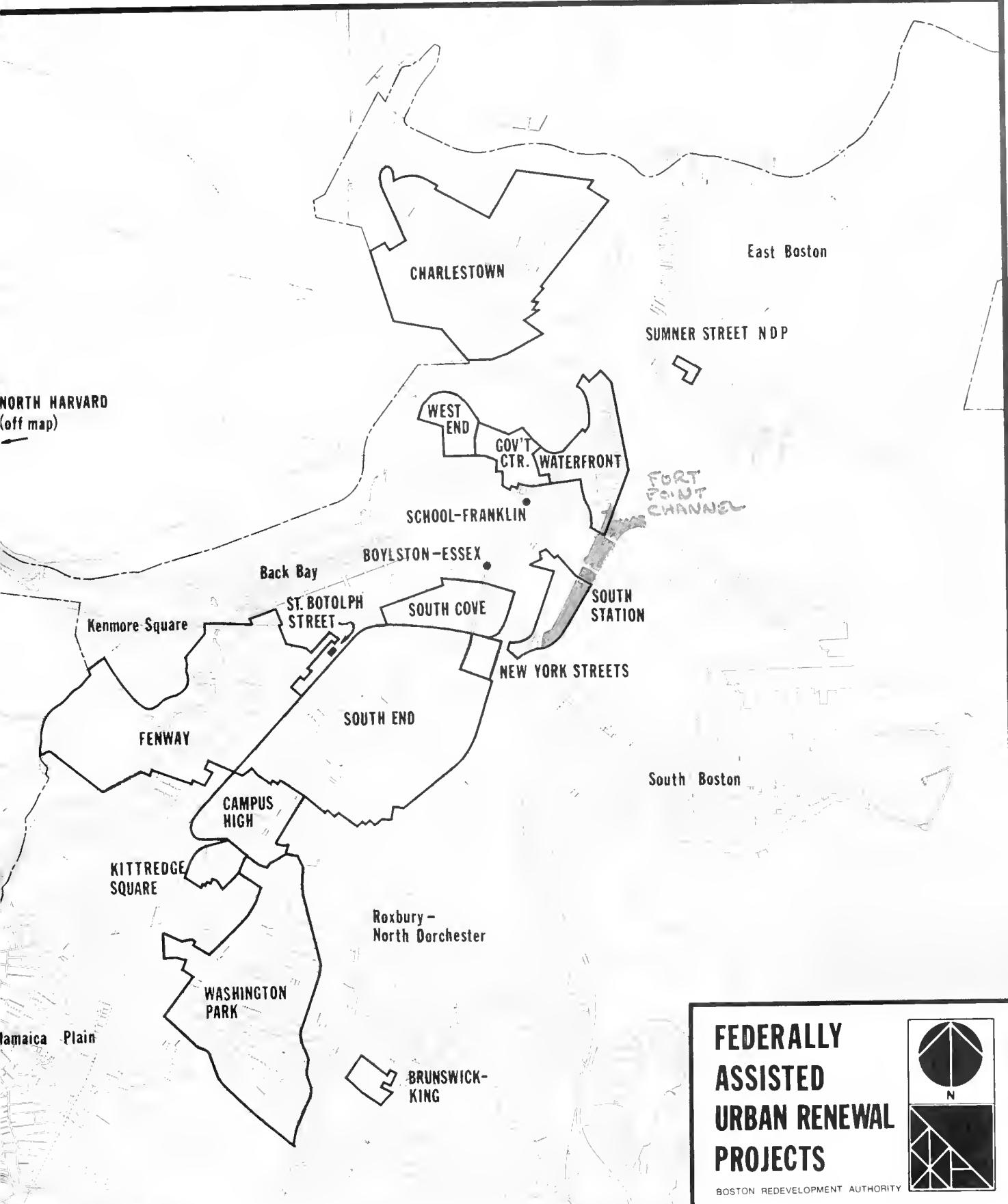
For that reason it appears that this project is both a sound and prudent investment for the City of Boston and the National Endowment for the Arts toward the provision of a public amenity and sensitive treatment of a city edge of local, regional and national importance.



## APPENDIX: MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

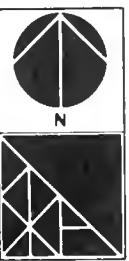
1. Map of Boston showing location of Fort Point Channel
2. Vertical aerial view of Fort Point Channel
3. Map of adjacent development
4. Aerial photograph (looking west)
5. Aerial photograph (looking east)
6. Bonner Map of Boston (1722)
7. Conceptual perspective





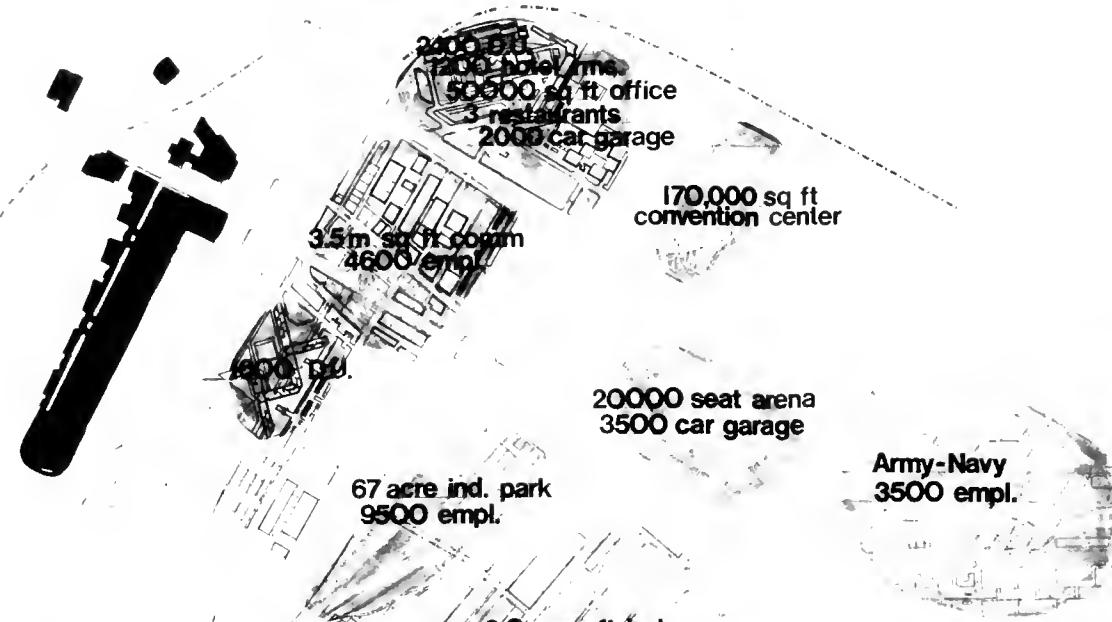
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BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

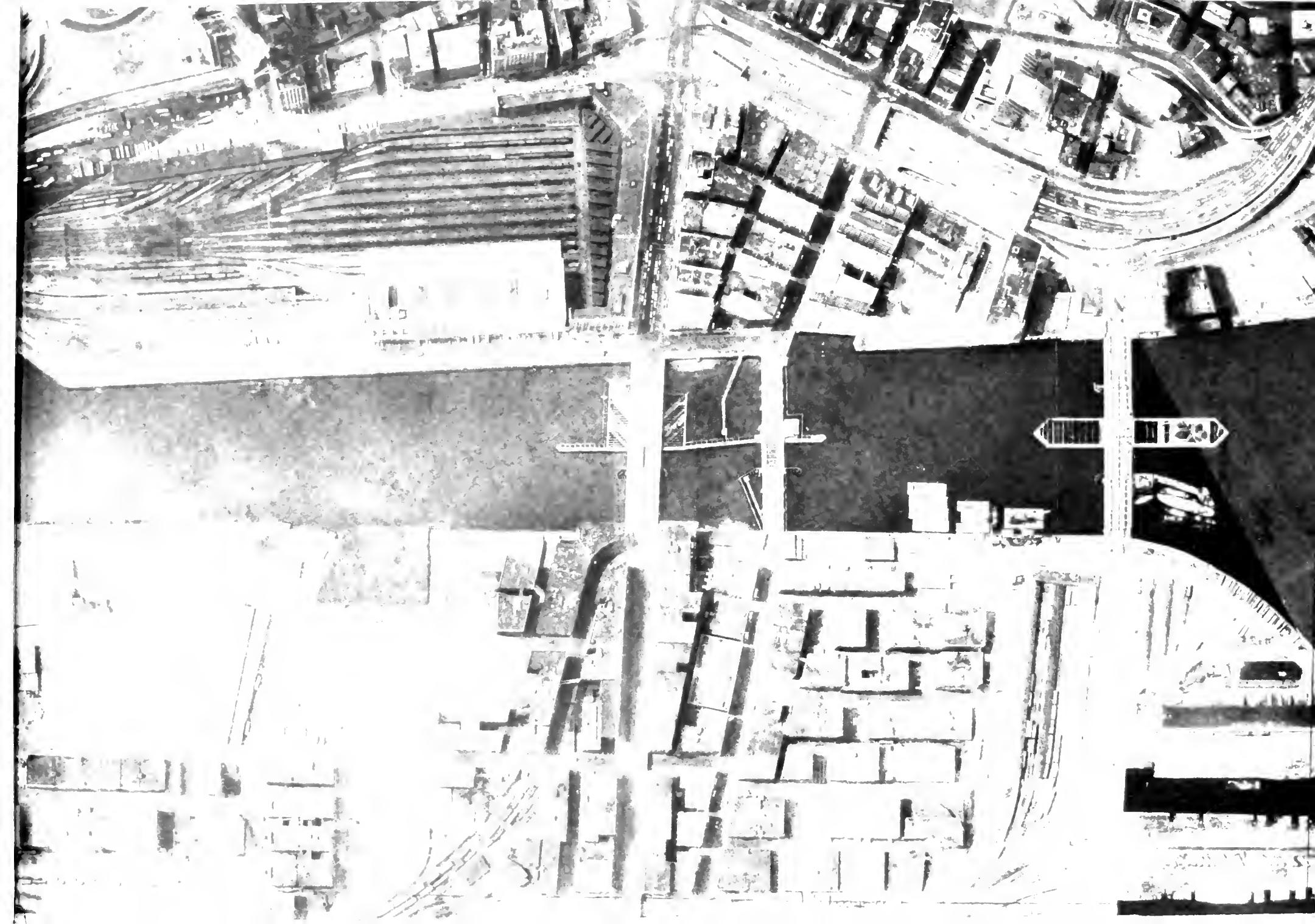




EXISTING and PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



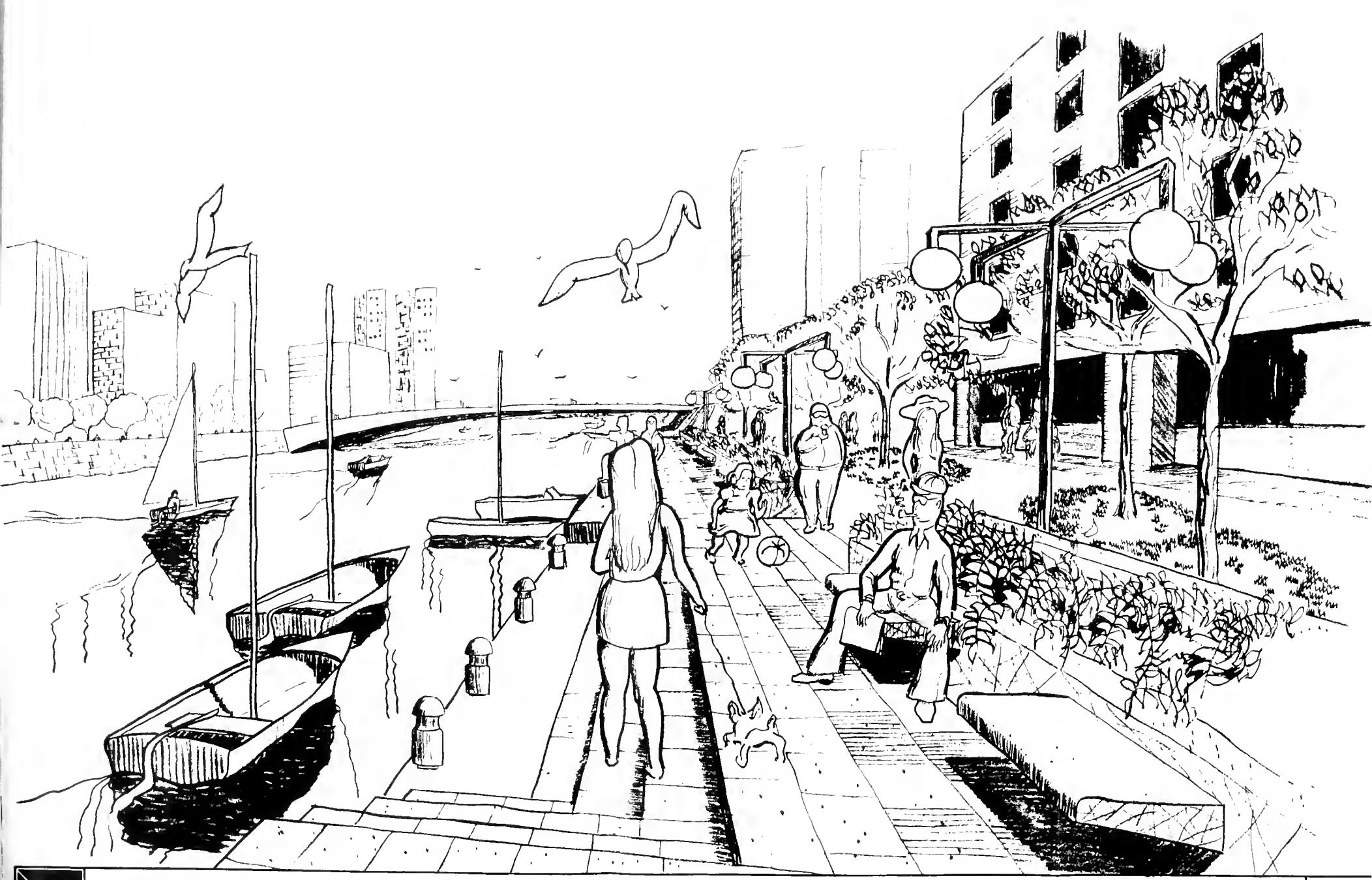












BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

URBAN DESIGN DEPARTMENT

PROJECT AREA:  
drawn by:  
scale:  
date:



## APPENDIX: PROJECT PARTICIPANT

The following actors and agencies have commitments, either by choice or by statute, to the development and implementation of a Fort Point Channel design development plan. Most are already involved in the efforts of the Fort Point Channel Area Study Group.

**City Agencies:**

- Boston Redevelopment Authority
  - planning and urban design functions
  - capital budgeting
- Traffic and Parking Department
  - transportation planning
  - signalization, local streets
- Public Works Department
  - Street and Sidewalk improvements
  - street lighting
  - utilities: sewer and water maintenance and sanitation
- Public Facilities Department
  - public building construction
  - construction of recreation
- Parks and Recreation Department
  - operation of recreational facility
  - park and playground maintenance
  - street trees and landscaping
- Office of Public Service
  - public relations
  - market research, citizen coordination

**State Agencies:**

- Department of Natural Resources
  - water pollution control
  - island resources
- Department of Public Works
  - Waterways Division
    - water pollution
    - removal of piers, etc.
  - Highway Division
    - bridge reconstruction
    - transportation planning
    - assistance to local agencies
  - Special Projects Division
    - bridge reconstruction
- Secretary of Transportation
  - harbor crossing tunnel
  - water transportation



**Federal Agencies:** Bureau of Outdoor Recreation  
open space  
Department of Housing & Urban Development  
community facilities funds  
planning monies  
sewer and water funds  
Post Office (U.S. Postal Service)  
some open space development  
public relations  
Federal Reserve Bank  
some open space development

**Special Agencies:** Massachusetts Port Authority  
development of adjacent piers  
public uses: convention center  
Mass. Bay Transportation Authority  
operation of public transportation  
Metropolitan District Commission  
operation of open space  
pollution control

**Private entities:** Pier Four, Incorporated  
adjacent development  
Town & Cities Properties, Ltd.  
adjacent development  
Gillette Corporation  
adjacent development  
ITT/Sheraton  
possible adjacent development



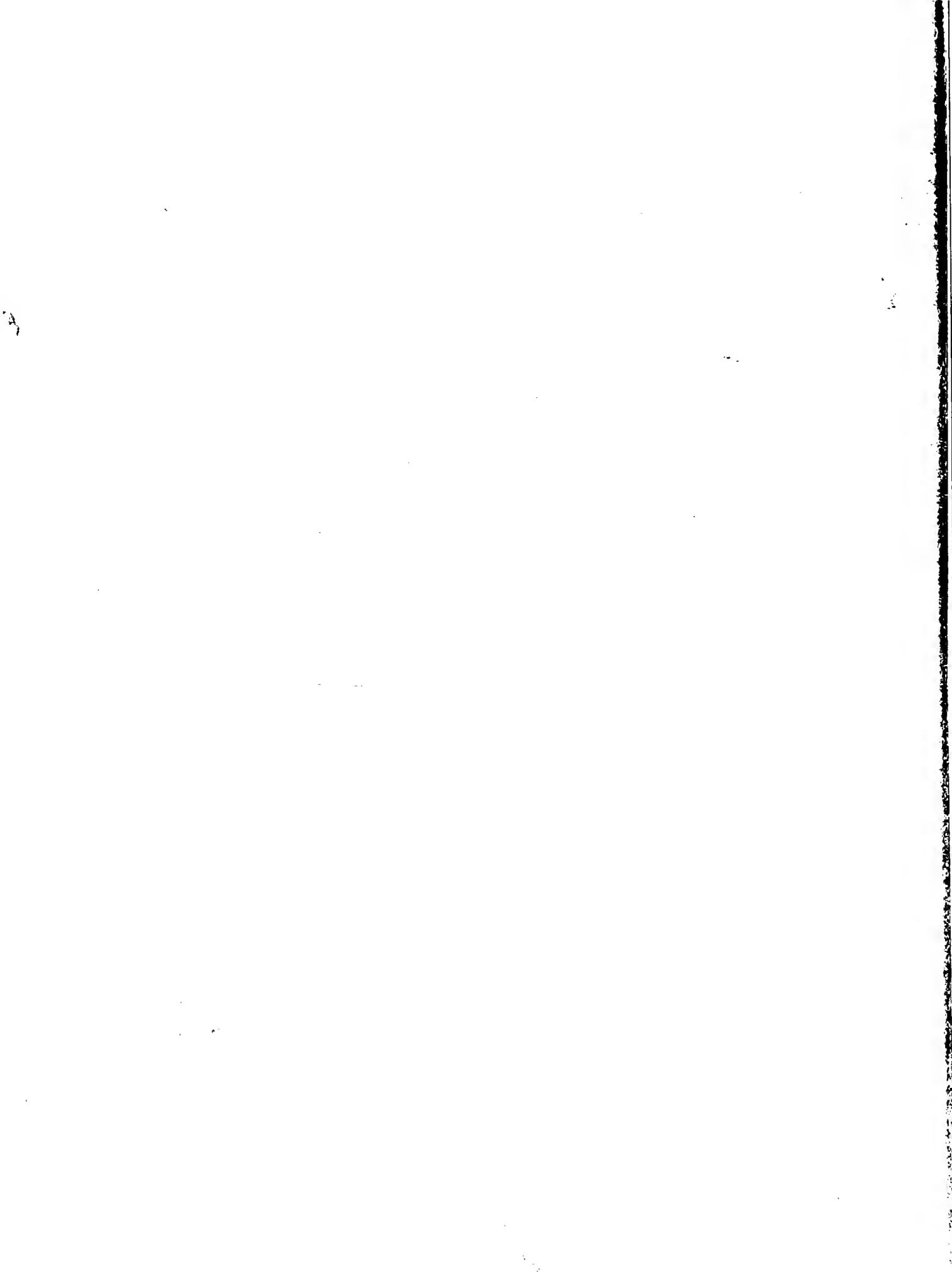
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